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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000107

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA

ALSO FOR IO PDAS WARLICK

P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY

USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER

NSC FOR MCDERMOTT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/26/2019

TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER PINR UNSC KPAL IS LE SY

SUBJECT: LEBANON: PRESIDENT SLEIMAN FIRMLY SUPPORTS ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) President Michel Sleiman reiterated his support for the Arab Peace Initiative (API) in a January 27 meeting with the Ambassador. He speculated that, although the Arab League was divided in its position on the API, the Kuwaitis and the Saudis could easily persuade some Arab League members to support the API, and that this should occur prior to the Doha Arab League summit in March. On Saudi-Syrian reconciliation, Sleiman was less optimistic, stating that more work was required before such reconciliation was possible. He professed to be unconcerned about Syrian President Asad's January 26 statements to Al Manar on the Special Tribunal, interpreting Asad's position as "nothing new." Sleiman said he expressed his concern about Palestinian arms during the January 26 National Dialogue session, while asserting that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) were incapable of addressing the issue at this time. On parliamentary elections, Sleiman stated clearly that he would not form an independent bloc, but that he would accept a bloc allied with him if candidates chose to form one. End summary.

SUPPORTIVE OF API,  
ARAB LEAGUE DIVIDED

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¶2. (C) On January 27, the Ambassador, accompanied by Pol/Econ Chief and PolOff, met President Michel Sleiman at Baabda Palace. Noting his firm support for the Arab Peace Initiative (API), Sleiman said that the Arab League members were divided in their support at the recent Doha Summit on Gaza, with Syria and Qatar strongly advocating to pull the initiative off the table. Sleiman said that many of the countries opposing the API did not fully comprehend the issue, and could be easily persuaded to reverse their stance.

According to Sleiman, the Moroccans, for example, had expressed support for his position in Kuwait, but then had agreed to suspend the API.

¶3. (C) Sleiman reported that he had requested the Kuwaiti Emir to work with the opposing member states before convening for the Arab League Summit in Doha in late March. Adding that he would also seek Saudi assistance to lobby states to support the API, Sleiman suggested the U.S. engage in similar

discussions with dissenting states. Ambassador noted President Obama's recent comments on the constructive elements of the API and the need to sustain an active commitment to seek two states living side by side in peace and security.

¶4. (C) Noting that he supported the API because there was no other solution on the table, Sleiman said he explained his position to the National Dialogue participants on January 26, and no one objected. He reiterated that his support for the API was firm.

¶5. (C) Sleiman downplayed the likelihood of Saudi-Syrian reconciliation, saying, "This needs work." He relayed that he had requested Kuwaiti involvement in the reconciliation, and would also ask the UAE to assist during his upcoming visit to Abu Dhabi.

UNCONCERNED ABOUT ASAD'S STATEMENTS ON SPECIAL TRIBUNAL

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¶6. (C) Sleiman said he was unconcerned about Syrian President Bashar Asad's January 26 Al-Manar interview, during which Asad said his government needed an agreement on the "rights and duties" with the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in order to comply with the Tribunal's demands. He added that Asad's position was "not new." (Comment: We and others here are concerned that Asad's comments to Al-Manar suggest he is challenging the authority of the Special Tribunal and attempting to preserve Syrian jurisdiction with regard to the

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involvement of any Syrian citizens. End comment.)

THOUGH A PRIORITY, UNABLE TO ADDRESS PALESTINIAN ARMS

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¶7. (C) Sleiman relayed that the National Dialogue also discussed the issues of Palestinian arms and "tawteen" (permanent Palestinian resettlement in Lebanon). He said that he intended to raise this issue frequently so that it remained a national issue, but added that he recognized the Lebanese Armed Forces currently was incapable of resolving or enforcing these issues.

WILL NOT FORM AN INDEPENDENT BLOC

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¶8. (C) "I am always taking a centrist position," Sleiman declared, adding, "I will not get involved in the elections." Citing Metn as an example, he said he does not have a single candidate in the district. In other districts such as Kesarwan, he admitted having friends, but asked rhetorically, how he could help them, saying that he could not provide financial or other assistance.

¶9. (C) "If they (independent candidates) choose to form a bloc that is next to the president, why not?" he stated. He added that he would be more involved in the aftermath of the elections, but until then, he would remain above the fray. According to Sleiman, Cultural Affairs Minister Tamam Salam, a Sunni from Tripoli close to Hariri, has expressed a desire to participate in a bloc allied with the president.

¶10. (C) Sleiman, without elaborating, relayed that he was asked to persuade Defense Minister Elias Murr to ally with Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun in the upcoming elections. Sleiman said that Elias's father, MP Michel Murr, opposed this idea, believing that Elias should not be a candidate at all if it meant allying with Aoun in Metn. Sleiman noted that Michel Murr is "very strong."

SLEIMAN'S TRAVEL PLANS

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¶11. (C) Sleiman's upcoming travel plans are as follows: UAE and Bahrain on February 9-10; Paris in mid-March; Doha at the end of March; London in mid-April; and Madrid in May.

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